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Someone from the hollow

Sina Queyras

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Masters of English (Creative Writing) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 1995

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## ABSTRACT

Someone from the hollow

Sina Queyras

The poem is divided into four sections: childhood, rites of passage, coming of age and coming to consciousness. Aside from the "Sweet Sixteen" section, which is written in the form of journal entries, the poems are meant to capture the natural process of memory as well as narrating one's life story: they are meant to have a fractured quality, while maintaining a larger narrative structure. I have attempted to overlay experiences and perceptions of specific events to illustrate the effects of trauma on an unconscious level, and then attempted to make these connections conscious. While I hope that each poem stands on its own, my intent is that this work be read as a narrative.

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Angels in the house

## **Falling to earth**

A woman in rubber boots makes her way across  
a clear cut    mosquitoes thick on her face  
and neck    sinking deep into the earth    the timing  
is all wrong    a half hour earlier  
and her husband could have driven her  
as it is he's already off to work and there are  
no taxis in this town    there is very little  
in this town yet aside from the camp the few  
houses springing up for those women insane  
or loyal enough to join their men    the daughter  
is coming now    in this field if she can't hold  
her back    the woman squeezes her knees together bends  
into herself and hollers into the sunrise    a man pulls  
his pick-up truck to the roadside to take a piss and spots her  
a woman in red a small question mark against the brush



### **Learning to play house**

Mother bakes pies in the afternoon singing country & western tunes along with the radio stopping now and then to check her face and hair in the bathroom mirror licks her finger wiper the eyebrows with the heel of her palm smooths the stray hairs which fall from her pony-tail and every once in awhile there are grey hairs to pluck for a nickel a piece employment reserved for me since my brother was caught pulling any old hair just to round things out to a quarter but it isn't every day she bakes some mornings she doesn't get out of bed only calls in a milky voice for me to come lie on her bed while she tells stories of growing up in the city how she slept in one room with three sisters and times were hard but there was always something going on not like this northern outpost without so much as a department store and on days like this I serve her tiny cakes baked in the *Easy Bake* tea from my plastic tea set sing all the songs she has taught me dance by her bed until she pulls herself up to join me and we begin our day

## **The brother**

My brother builds roads and bridges in the mud that is the yard pushing the earth around and just as quickly as he creates he destroys his two feet casually kicking he doesn't like to play with other kids prefers to explore the workings of machinery from Father's pick-up truck takes everything apart toys scatter in pieces the radio from the kitchen counter becomes a bomb broom handles are rifles to shoot the cat my dolls me anything that moves in the summer he builds forts barricades himself inside with his stash of stripped housewares pretending he is an inventor of space ships and ray guns always exploring claiming whatever comes within his reach as his own throws tantrums whenever he doesn't get his way which Mother says is because he is delicate and has a genius quality about him so I should try not to make him mad

## **Learning to count blessings**

On days when it is too cold to go outside my brother and I find ways to amuse ourselves indoors we make tents in the living room and I serve sugar-water from my pink plastic tea service but some days we run out of imagination we whine and complain about the weather and lack of toy selection until my Mother gives in and tells us stories which twist and turn the moral sometimes eluding me for years after like the one about the boy who was born without a body no arms no legs no heart no neck just a head but his parents loved him so much they modified the house so that he could roll around they built a ledge on the window so he could roll up and watch the neighbourhood kids playing street hockey or kick the can they bought endless toys hired clowns to perform for him had a private tutor come in every morning and in the afternoons his Mother read stories but even with all this he was a sad little boy and lonely because it was difficult to play without arms and legs and he was only in the company of adults but one day his Mother had to leave suddenly so before she left she made a milk shake put it in his special cup turned on the tv and made the boy promise not to answer the door at which point I asked well how could he if he wanted to anyhow and my Mother said that they had designed a small door like a cat door so the boy could roll onto the verandah in the summer but the mother made him promise not to even go out his door and as soon as she left the boy rolled up to the window and looked longingly at the kids playing in the warm sun and he decided that even with everything his parents gave him his life was too dull it just wasn't enough to be in the house all day alone so he rolled down the ramp across the room through his little door bumped down the stairs and down the walkway out to the street at which point a car came and squashed him flat as a pizza which is why my Mother says you should always quit while you're a head

## Learning to run

Some days Mother says she is drowning in the house as if the house was an ocean the house a vessel she has no control over does not know how to navigate can only manage for moments before panicking and then she gets in her car and drives off sometimes remembering my brother and I comes back determined to pick us up and head off again over and over running remembering us coming back trying again but each time my Father leaves for work my brother and I for school the hole in the house grows bigger water filling the rooms making her head spin in our absence the drowning and when we reappear she has to punish us for being the only reason she has to stay I hear her pray at night for forgiveness promise never to do this again but every morning in our absence drowning

## **Lily Marlene**

In the afternoon we chase dust balls into corners swoop upon them with our mop  
wash the tiles in a circular motion square by square until they reflect our bobbing heads  
we wash cupboards make beds precisely tucking corners and as we feel our way  
through the house Mother sings *Mona Lisa* or *The Wedding of Lily Marlene* and each  
time she comes to the *tears in the crowded congregation* her voice lowers and in that moment  
the slow steady circle of her sadness becomes me

## **Learning to fly**

Sometimes at night I float from my bed out the window high above my house    some nights  
I almost get away but the smell of smoke the sound of Mother singing and I turn back to earth see  
flames shooting out the windows the bulging doors    sometimes my family is there on the lawn  
waving up and I try to swoop down thinking I can scoop them up but when I steer myself toward  
earth air currents lift and twist me so that the ground seems to be falling and I am sucked into the  
universe the house my family    can't keep them in focus beyond grey clouds of rain and fury and  
finally I realize I have no wings in fact I never did

falling

I am

not ready to believe in wings  
wake in my bed dizzy  
have to lean out my bedroom window to throw up

## **Bible stories**

Outside my window a maple tree the sound of cars turning the corner mingles with the tick of the cuckoo clock its pine cone chimes and a little blue bird that pops out on the half hour I spend long nights trying not to sleep don't want the dreams don't want to wake to the hands always hands I sit in the corner of my bed watch the headlights move across the wall up the ceiling remember the way my brothers' airplanes seemed to be flying over the bed and then I feel dizzy and try to count to a hundred in French remember bible stories from Sunday school look for signs of God a flash of light a branch breaking the face of Jesus crying in the shadows on the wall but there is only the ticking of the clock and finally a story about a boy who was going to die and an angel came to him and said if he could sleep one night through his arm extended toward heaven the hand ready for Jesus to hold he would be saved so I lie myself down my arm propped up on a pillow hoping an angel will swoop down and take my hand but there is never an angel and each morning I wake in a ball on the bed knowing that I'm farther and farther from heaven arms wrapped tightly around me alone

### **White winged**

I am a moth among the Lilies  
singing for you who  
cannot see me  
you whose steps  
echo whose fingers  
pull my wings touch  
the delicate powder  
which clips my  
flight I spiral  
an ungraceful  
feather  
floating to the ground



## Night flannel

The night is fuzzy with streetlights and the creaking of doors and then the light in my room flashed on and she is scooping me out of bed in my new flannels the pink sheets wrapped tightly around me and we are down the stairs and into the *Valiant* and passing by other houses and streetlights and neon outside the hotel there are people swaying in the lobby a dwarf stands in a doorway pulling passersby into a room full of smoke and coloured lights and a woman in a fur coat is yelling that she hasn't had too much in fact she hasn't had enough might never have enough and who is he to tell her when she has to stop there is a cubbyhole in the wall and a man with a cigar and shiny head winks at me and my sheet runs his hand over the wrappings of candy and gum potato chips and cigarettes and for a moment I think we've gone to the fair the one at Lake Winnipeg in the summer but then there is a scuffle and the woman in the fur flies out the swinging doors and my Mother slips into an elevator pulling my head close to hers so that I can smell smoke and lavender perfume and then my cheek brushes hers and is wet as the doors open the light changes and in the narrow hallway I lick a tear from her cheek the way she always licks mine and she gives a deep moan that makes us both shake as she turns the key to the little one-bedded room

## Teeth marks

It is Saturday morning and while my Mother sleeps I sneak over to Terry's house where there is a playroom in the basement. Terry has several Barbie dolls with various lengths of hair also a Barbie house Barbie car and a pink overflowing Barbie wardrobe carrying-case which she opens and offers me a doll. Terry dresses her own in formal evening wear styles her hair with tiny plastic combs. I undress mine and stare at the hard plastic breasts which have teeth marks on them. From the dog she assures me when he was a puppy she has a new Ken doll which is smooth and smiling. You could marry them Terry decides rummaging for a bridesmaid's outfit but before I know it Ken pushes Barbie down to the floor and is humping her. Terry screams at me to stop says it isn't funny but Ken goes on humping and soon he is pushing her across the green shag carpet and finally Terry jumps up steps right on her Barbie house grabs Ken and throws him across the room. I grab the naked Barbie and hide her under my sweater. Terry tells me I have to leave shoves the clothes and dolls back into her wardrobe she doesn't ask me for the doll back so I hug it close pull my knees up tight to my chin rock back and forth until the bedroom door opens wide.

## **Motel summer**

In the motel there are a dozen units and several *pads* upon which small trailers sit there is a woman with wild red hair who plays Janis Joplin records so loud all of us know the words to *Me and Bobby McGee* Mother says Janis has the voice of a wounded angel she cries whenever a slow song winds its way into our room there are kids everywhere we play kick the can and every time I find a good spot I lose because I can't leave once I dug myself into a haystack with only a small hole to breathe from and it wasn't until the sky was so black that the mountain behind the motel shifted and lost itself to the night that I pushed my way out and ran for the can the motel is full of road builders some with families most without there are two men in the unit next to ours one of them takes me walking on hot afternoons and I have a stomach ache afterwards Mother says I'm not too old to nap and I lie on her double bed listening to the can sliding across the pavement outside in the other room Mother makes coffee sings along with Janis waits for her man to find his way home for the maids with whom she shares her pain for lunch time a burger at the cafe down the street for the hours to pass until the bingo game for this road to be finished and the potential for magic with the next one

## **Beyond the grey**

The sky is always blue  
even when the clouds press  
in at the windows  
and there are hands  
that are not healing

The young ones  
palms and eyes open  
know this  
look beyond sorrow  
to the robin's egg  
see the possibility  
of forgiveness  
every morning faith  
in love

## **Walking on Fire**

The air is purple and smoky from piles of burning leaves at the north end of the field a farmer stands by his tractor waving at me as I run and I've heard of trespassing and salt guns which makes me run faster tripping on the uneven earth below hard chunks stubborn with woody stalks chopped by the steel of his plough where the pee has soaked into the denim my thighs sting and I know that if I run as fast as I can I might take off might lift up and soar above the shifting mountains away from the roads and schools from the hands I am running the farmer is running the red plaid of his shirt driving me further and it is not until I am in the centre of the field that I feel the heat in my runners that I stop to take a breath smell the melting rubber see the embers alive and smoking under foot

## Night road

It is midnight when we pull away from the house    my collection of 45's The Bee Gees  
Elton John and Stevie Wonder    stacked in the unfinished basement    my Father's truck loaded  
with grease guns and tool chests smelling of wine-tipped cigars    no telling how long we will  
drive tonight where we are going or why    he says nothing as we pull into a *Husky Stop*  
where I order chocolate milk and a donut    watch him pour cream into his coffee with his  
calloused black hands half expecting him to stir his coffee with his thumb    launch into  
rhyming tales of the north like the ones I have been forced to memorize at school    but he is  
hunched over his cup under the weight of nothing ever turning out the way he dreams    of  
my Mother refusing to follow script    of the endless road unrolling before him and although  
I am too old for dolls it occurs to me that mine will not sleep tonight    they will be stiff and  
lifeless in my pink room    waiting for me to do my rounds    to bless and kiss  
and tuck them into bed

## **The lighthouse**

I spend whole days searching for safe harbours  
begin to think of myself as a lighthouse hold myself  
very still beam the brightest light imaginable practice  
keeping my gaze fixed for hours in front of the mirror  
practice by trying to out-stare the cat practice  
until the boys at school are convinced I am a witch so still  
I can stand in the hallway at school and not be seen students  
flow around me like a river runs around a rock  
but when I am struck it is by something solid  
someone who cannot see well enough to navigate around boulders  
and in my stillness I mistake this collision for fate  
and because of this am always surrounded  
by people who lack vision

## **Learning to wink**

Life is hard Mother tells me you have to go out of your way to make people smile because everyone wants to smile but they get caught up in their lives the details of which are sad and unimportant and can be released with a smile and a wink especially men who shoulder most of the worldly burdens so when we drive through town on the way to the pharmacy or for a cheeseburger we make a point of making men smile at red lights we both lean toward the window smiling at men in semi's or cabs or delivery vans we wink at mailmen and city workers ditch diggers and traffic cops my Mother and me sailing down city streets highways and alleys smiling winking nodding even in restaurants over our burgers and shakes she goes out of her way to wink like that and often they pull a chair up to our booth or try to pay for our lunch which isn't the point Mother says and politely refuses anything other than a good story in return but sometimes they are insistent as though the boundaries Mother set out aren't clear and they follow us through our day until we find a way to lose them through the back door of a restaurant or speeding away in the car Mother laughing hysterically patting me on the leg saying some people just aren't satisfied with passing goodness they have to spoil it all by wanting to hold on to moments long after they are done



## **The Latin mystery**

My Father drinks *Cointreau* with his omelets those Sundays he is with us and being Catholic is fond of church though he never seems to have time during the year or maybe he just saves it all for Midnight Mass which seems long enough to last Mother says for a month of Sundays if she has her way we watch the mass on tv which is infinitely more impressive from inside the *Vatican* and while we watch my Father sings the hymns and recites Latin which annoys Mother who finds this even more pretentious than the clumsy French he reverts to for his seasonal hymns and phone calls back home but sometimes my Father's desire for a cigar gets the best of him and we go for walks after our omelets he with his hands behind his back cigar dangling from his mouth me with my hands behind my back talking non-stop and occasionally our destination is church where we sit on the hard pews my Father taking deep breaths and longing for the Latin service which is getting harder and harder to find he says because of missals and bulls and the general modernization of the church a point he disagrees with in his sad and resigned way because especially in this wild land of pioneering men His lambs are lost and some days my Father is convinced that they will never find the peace of God the voice within which enables him to work twelve-hour days away from his family outside when the temperature drops below zero to not indulge in alcohol or adultery sins he assures me even a good Catholic is tempted by and as we walk home I often think I feel the hand of God on my shoulder hear the sound of angels in his humming the mystery of Latin elevating my Father high above his dull and grease-stained self

### **In the Lilies**

I have seen the baby underwear  
caught in barbed wire  
worn myself ragged trying to light  
darkened rooms  
how the whole world has tipped  
off its axis  
by the weight of men's desire  
of women losing  
again their foothold in gravity

I cannot bring you to the light  
tip the balance of the world  
I sit in the Lilies  
hover by your ear at night  
whisper the way home

## Honky-tonk Angels

On Saturday nights my brother and I sometimes camp in front of the tv and long after the late show and popcorn my Mother dances home trailing the last of the die-hard drinkers from the Legion down the street the liquor cabinet is opened drinks poured as if it were Christmas the beer nuts come out and I am sent to spread *Cheez Wiz* on crackers pull out gherkins and olives as her entourage arrange themselves on the plush chesterfield dropping cigarette ashes and spilling beer on the high gloss tables and on these nights there is always a sing-a-long cracked voices soft liquid eyes staring up as they sing and Mother the fallen angel choir leader her cigarette keeping time sings until the last one has nodded off or stumbled out into the early morning hours after these nights there are golden days of cleaning singing and dancing gentle pats on the head as if someone had sprinkled fairy dust over the house I sleep soundly in my freshly laundered sheets

### **The way we died then**

In summer we play pass-out on the lawn counting down one  
one-thousand two one-thousand three then you deflate yourself  
and one of the big boys squeezes your last breath the world slipping  
away and you wake up less than a minute later lying on the grass  
but in those few seconds before they turn to see you awake  
you know that you have died your soul hanging in the air listening  
to them count the next one down

## **How we deal with my brother**

You don't say no to my brother when he wants to play a game you don't say anything when he cheats you hold your breath and let him win let him tie you to his bedpost to experiment because he is an explorer and has qualities of genius and is too curious for his own good but boys have to be curious and when he is angry not even my Father can hold him down sometimes I think he is like Sampson with the strength of ten men I lie awake wondering what would happen if I snuck into his room and cut his long hair or his hands if I cut them off could he still but I know he would find a way he would whisper in my ear tell me not to be cruel that he will always protect me and it's true he is always fighting but never for protection it is always because some people don't know that they can't say no to my brother when he wants to play a game that you can't say anything when he cheats that you're supposed to hold your breath and let him win

## Hormones

One day you're flat enough to squeeze through the bathroom window on those days when you forget your key climb trees swinging from branch to branch hang out in the field with the neighbourhood boys playing ball and the next day you're in the bathroom with a pain and blood and you have to march down to the drugstore for sanitary napkins while the clerk smiles and your Mother winks drags you to the ladies lingerie department for real underwear and a bra because your sleek shape is slipping away flesh shifting and suddenly lipstick and nail polish appear beside your bed appointments are made for permanents you are squeezed into dresses and taught to cross your legs rather than sit comfortably and every male that looks your way seems to sense the changes and suddenly it is not possible to hang from trees or play football with the guys they hold you a second longer when they tackle their hands brushing your chest and suddenly they begin to talk about you as if you weren't there and your brother likes to surprise you when you're dressing likes to run his finger across your blouse and your Mother tells you to be prepared for unwanted attention from men because that's how they are and be even more careful of women who are always jealous and therefore much less loyal

**Sweet Sixteen on the Skeena**

### **The un-birthday present**

My English teacher Mr. D says my life is no crazier than anyone else's it's just that I see what's going on    says I should write down my thoughts and dreams so I can work through them    says I'll have bruises but at least I'll get through headstrong as I am and figuring out where we came from is about all we can do in life    Mr. D gave me a journal with quotes from famous people for my un-birthday    says I remind him of a deer in early morning mist    says I am often in a past or pensive mood    I love how he sees life as a knot of illusions to unravel



**May 1979**

Don't know why they call it *sweet sixteen* means nothing but trouble all the cafeteria girls munching on *Old Dutch* talking about sex make it sound so essential me dating Jerry and his blue *Datsun* steady cranks his *Radio Shack* sound system never pushes me to let him come inside just listens to Tom Waits' *Blue Valentine* over and over looks at me sad and longing lets me smoke cigarettes one after the other as long as we drive

Last night I dreamed that my room was on fire and I slipped out the window high above and I could hear my brother yelling for help but I couldn't save him I just kept flying higher and higher and in the morning he was at the table looking miserable and angry as if he knew what I had dreamed

One excellent thing my new guitar with a case so I can carry it around on hot afternoons I skip class lose myself in the dry grass behind the school watch the clouds practice chords until my fingertips ache

## June 1979

Long days and school ending we spend hours driving up and down main honking and looping back through the A&W everyone but me camping at the lake the last week of June because Mother can't let me go away that long says she knows what kind of things will happen there and I laugh saying well what happens here she slaps me hard across the face says if I have so much time for lounging maybe I should get a job

Mother decides she needs to see Dad the last week of June leaves for camp where he lives all summer so I pack my bag and head for the lake but the rhythm of my feet the quiet air the ring of violet and fuchsia over the northern mountains holds me I keep walking till the sun comes up not caring where I am just that the air is sweet and the world an astounding place

## July 1979

Worked my first shift at *Mr. Sizzle* we wear polyester zip-up uniforms and mine is so big I can wear it over jeans and a sweatshirt although this isn't encouraged today I learned how to slice pie and refill the salad bar I'm thinking of becoming a vegetarian I like the million ways you can serve salad

Mother decides she wants a garden though it's too late you can't tell her she goes to the plant store buys potted palms hibiscus and lilies the woman tells her they aren't proper bedding plants but Mother says she's just jealous she hasn't thought of it before

It's too hot to hang around town the pavement burns through my sneakers I sit down by the Skeena with my guitar thinking up lines to songs which all rhyme it's quiet the air full of white puffs from the cotton woods a moose walks out of the bush behind me swims right across the river isn't pushed downstream more than six feet and I've never seen anything beat that current strong enough to swallow a whole airplane not a thing left but a scrap of wing metal and one wheel

## August 1979

There's a party by the river a dozen cars in a circle with their stereos blasting and a bonfire in the middle the school jock keeps leaping over the flames the fine blonde hair on his legs singed there is a boy with skin as smooth as velvet who nuzzles my neck all night and shares his six pack with me the beer is fine but it isn't enough to have him touching me the way he wants I walk up to the highway hitch a ride back to town find Jerry in the *Pizza Shed* discussing ways of growing pot indoors

The trailer park women nod and point at Mother's garden the palms are thriving but she has to keep replacing the lilies which is okay she says because she likes to match the colours with her outfits she has moved her arm chair and end tables out onto the lawn every night I go and drag them under the carport every morning back onto the grass I think the idea is to attract women friends but they hear the goings-on at night

Jerry tells me we are cosmically aligned and owe it to each other to consummate our meeting I tell him if he's so cosmic he should be above sex he tells me that's not what mysticism is all about

## September 1979

This is the school term of my sixteenth year new texts new paper promises promises I will have perfect pages no erasing first time round right grammar and algebra is going to be my friend

Ran into Mr. D outside the cafeteria today but he wouldn't speak to me because I was eating potato chips and coke which he finds offensive he told me to come and see him when I have given up my chemical addictions

Even though my Mother bought me the guitar and let me get my license I'm tired of her parties and I'm tired of my brother like all my new pages aren't enough I tell her my plans she keeps saying the new *Super Save Best Price Smiling Face Supermarket* is hiring and it's union the produce man is single and has his eye on me unlike Jerry he has a future and always keeps his oranges in neat pyramids

*The Pretenders* are the most amazing band in the universe and Chrissie Hynde is the most amazing woman ever to pick up a guitar she wears a red leather jacket with buckles over a black outfit pointed shoes and a snarl if I had leather being sixteen would be excellent

I keep telling Mother she'll have to dig up the palms but she wants to wait like she's going to harvest something other than an early frost

## October 1979

It was only a matter of time but it came sooner than later mom all whacked out not even able to find her bed and a school day on top of it I clean her up leave soda water and a bucket within reach throw my clothes into green garbage bags and cab over to Jerry's basement but his mom isn't keen on me free-loading after a few days I find a small trailer in the north end of town now everyone wants to move in even the Landlord who's a friend of a friend but I want it all to be perfect new pages no erasing promises promising

Jerry stays over but he sleeps on the floor in the living room I tell him I am a vegetarian now and he is angry because he just shot a deer and wants to cook venison for me says being vegetarian is fine in California but this far north in winter animal fat and fur is how we survive

Jerry drives me by my Mother's early in the morning and we dig up the palms and hibiscus which is kind of like salvation more than stealing cause they wouldn't survive and she just can't accept the nature of things in their own way

I have a new frier:J Anna who works at *Mr. Sizzle* we squeak around in our running shoes eat frozen chocolate pie in the back while the cooks wash lettuce and scrub grease the grill cook is always dropping the steaks picking them up with his long tongs wiping them on his apron and re-sizzling yesterday Anna and I had a baked potato war every time I see her I have to smile she tells me we are too silly to be sixteen

**November 1979**

In school we're studying poetry and nothing rhymes I'm not doing well which makes me sad because I know what they want I just don't know how to give it I complained to Mr. D who told me that teachers were only people trained to do things a certain way and couldn't be counted on to recognize originality he also told me that if people don't stop eating animals we aren't going to evolve

Jerry here every night now Anna too Dad comes by to give me blankets says Mother is worried about me being warm enough this winter Jerry and I tack them on to the front windows where we have no curtains so now you can't see my collection of wine bottles that lines the sill *Blue Nun Mateus Mouton Cadet* I tell Anna we're drinking our way across Europe

Outside Dad by his truck smoking with Jerry nodding and pointing later Jerry gets all pushy with me wanting us to go shopping together and buy sheets I tell him to fuck off and die I don't need him or his money he slams out yelling don't expect him back for dinner like I care at all or even notice what he does

## December 1979

Jerry back from hunting we don't talk about the deer any more he has it cut at J.D.'s place where they conspire ways to make me take it in I won't allow it in the house after the morning I woke up sick with my period and found a roast thawing the blood covering the counter and a pool in the centre of the kitchen floor

*Mr. Sizzle* threw a Christmas party on Saturday and we all got very drunk even though the only employee over nineteen is Dick the cook who prefers to be called Mick but Anna and I can't stop saying hey Dick whose dick laughing until he gets all mad and stutters Anna and I went dateless which was excellent because I had the best time I've ever had and all the gals sat at a big table drinking and smoking *Du mauriers* later when the music started we made a big circle and danced with ourselves

I am sad tonight because of Christmas and my family and even though I don't want to see them I want to see them Jerry took me out in the *Datsun* listened to Jackson Browne sing *Running on Empty* let me rewind it a dozen times before he got impatient it's very dark now not like in summer when there is purple light in the northern sky all night we pulled off near the creek where they have bonfires on the weekend found a perfect Christmas tree which Jerry cut with the hatchet he keeps in the trunk Jerry says he's a true mountain man and I could never be lost if I stayed by his side



## **New Year's Eve**

Jerry gone to see about work on the coast Anna had a party but I was sick and stayed in bed not minding the noise and music because it was good to know there were people so close by and who wants to be sick alone I fell asleep and woke up with my legs spread someone moving on me tried to scream but he had my mouth covered he says sh sh I'm almost done which he was and I lay there listening to Anna and her friends banging pots and yelling Happy New Year out the window

## January 1980

Anna has a boyfriend now he comes by to pick her up in his dark blue *Ford Ranger* they spend hours driving around and everything she does with him she says is romantic also he is thoughtful and buys her whatever she wants

I ask Anna what's the definition of a virgin and she says it's when penetration takes place pen-e-tray-shun you know Anna rolls her eyes like I'm stupid which I am and I try to tell her how I'm a virgin and will be until the day I decide I want to have sex and I don't care what the definition is

My brother keeps calling he says Mother is miserable and taking it out on him says he misses me asks me what I'm wearing while I'm talking to him and finally I slam the phone down as hard as I can hope I break his ear drum hope he falls into the Skeena without a trace nothing left of him not even a strand of hair or a shoe

Even though Jerry's a jerk I want him back just so I can tell him to fuck off when he tries to touch me and we can drive and drive listening to music on his *Radio Shack* sound system I told the Landlord I couldn't sleep and he gave me something which doesn't help but makes me feel a lot happier than I've been in awhile

Mirror mirror on the wall who's the gal who wants it all

## February 1980

Anna rarely comes home at night the snow is piled up to the window I don't speak for whole days just wrapped in a blanket listening to Stevie Wonder remembering the way Mother used to sing me to sleep and wishing I was still small enough to snuggle up with her during these endless nights

Speak of the devil and she appears Mother always said and she did popped out of the *Finishing Touches* cosmetic store in the mall but I hid behind a plastic palm tree near the *Miami hot buns* stand so she wouldn't see me the tiled floor seemed to roll as she walked by I wanted to run after her but I started crying and had to hide my face in the palm for an impossibly long time

Someone finally noticed I haven't gone to school since Remembrance Day big deal like I need to know mathematical equations to count the number of slices per pie

I have started sleeping with the Landlord now he brings over cases of beer and bottles of wine sometimes we drink all night at least until I fall asleep

**March 1980**

Jerry back from the coast and I'm feeling all territorial like I missed him or something which gets him all worked up and turned on I say it isn't like that but would he defend me if he had to Jerry pulls his hunting knife from its long black leather sheath starts sharpening it says just point the way but I can't tell him how it made me feel and how I'm not sure if he was right when he said he knew I wanted it he could tell from my eyes

Quit *Mr.Sizzle* today when I found the guys make one third more than the girls and just because they grill and we cut pie Jerry says don't worry he's back now and will take care of me I grab his crotch and squeeze as hard as I can he doubles over then charges like a football player swings me round yelling what was that for what was that for I just keep hitting him and hitting him and I can't say why

Anna quit *Mr.Sizzle* in support of me and now is mad because we don't have any money for wine and neither does her boyfriend Ray who is also unemployed but she's running out of patience with him she says it isn't like it was in the beginning

**April 1980**

Jerry is really pissed because the Landlord told him I was sleeping with him and Jerry has been so patient and caring and providing and I won't let him touch me but I care for him and he doesn't understand how that can't be about letting someone fuck me the way the Landlord does

Anna and I at a party by the creek last night the guy from New Year's Eve comes up and grabs me from behind he's with three guys who all want to have fun because I'm cool and a good lay I throw my beer in his face but then I just stand there like a deer stunned by headlights I want to scream or run but everyone is watching and he says why ya being such a bitch so I laugh and say he should be more polite if he wants to have fun and one of his friends wearing a baseball cap that says shit head pops a bottle for me with his teeth

Walking home with Anna I tell her about New Year's Eve and she said the guy is a prick asshole fucker and I don't have to think twice about sending Jerry to slice his balls off which makes me feel a whole lot better though I'm not up to telling Jerry about it yet

Anna says she's through with Ray who said he would help her with the abortion and then didn't and I cry because she never told me until it was over and I would have been there to hold her hand she says she couldn't move for a week and then the tears started and she wasn't sure what was more sad all that had been or what could have been or that her Mother hadn't said anything at all

**May 1980**

My sixteenth year is almost over and I still haven't slept with Jerry or talked to my mom not even at Christmas I'm fed up with the Landlord and the guy from New Year's Eve and all of them even Jerry who is threatening to sleep with someone else and I say go ahead because he isn't going to get it from me not ever

Last night Anna and I ate mushrooms and drank wine we stayed up all night listening to *The Secret Life of Plants* and before the sun rose we went out to hear the lilies sing though they didn't then we tried some trees and finally the grass and when we were lying there I thought that Ray was the luckiest person on earth because he had slept with Anna so I kissed her and she kissed me back and we just lay there holding hands on the grass watching the sun rise all purple and orange over the mountains

Mr. D says there are a million ways to live and no one path is right for everyone he quotes Robert Frost tells me I will always be okay as long as I'm writing down my thoughts tells me I'm a poet which makes me sad because everybody knows poets are sad and lonely and die alone in run-down apartments

## **June 1980**

Even though I'm not sure it's true I told Jerry that I was a lesbian and that's why I couldn't let him sleep with me he says that's cool if we were together I could sleep with as many women as I wanted to and he wouldn't even mind watching

Mr. D has been telling me about life in the city he flies down every couple of months for movies and galleries and book stores he tells me I should go there find out who I am if I can save enough this summer I'll hitch a ride there in September I told Anna tonight and she was happy for me says she might go as well but has to finish school first

With Anna the world slows down my heart we walk up to the bluffs behind the trailer sit with our backs against each other eating peanuts and smoking cigarettes below us the town hugging the Skeena cars and people logging trucks ferrying trees from the bare patches on the northern mountains Anna tells me this life isn't for us we'll do well in the city where anything is possible we can find a job get an apartment listen to music and get stoned we can lie in bed all day touching in soft places and never let anyone tear us apart

Headlights in the night



### **In which the deer learns of the forest**

At the 7-11 on Davie I met a man who composed poetry in his head said he never wrote any of it down he invited me to a party and on the way stopped at a restaurant where we snorted lines of coke through a rolled up twenty after the first round I giggled when I saw my face in the jagged mirror held to my nose and the white powder blew away the poet almost cried said if he wasn't so romantic he would slap me

The poet spoke in couplets which often seemed to rhyme said he composed lines for all the beautiful people he met

*At the 7-11 a doe-  
eyed girl buying du mauriers  
how delightful a deer  
grazing over-lit aisles*

All night long the poet introduced me as his doe-eyed girl which made me think that even if he didn't write down his poems he cheated by memorizing lines at the party he rhymed assorted women my way the designer who said she had a mannequin that looked just like me the prairie woman with lizard-skin boots who offered to rope me in but the poet said I wasn't a cow I was a dear and much too young for a chicken hawk like her

*doe a deer  
a female deer  
much too sweet  
for aging queers*

In the back of the warehouse a huge fish net hung from the ceiling the poet said it was the bedroom and I hesitated but he laughed and said not to worry he preferred having sex with himself I could hear faint mewing as we climbed up the ropes made our way to a little loft in the back where a black light was on and in a cardboard box seven kittens in a knot I picked the doziest one held her to my neck so she could feel my pulse the poet said they were too young to be taken but I couldn't leave her in all the noise and smoke so I hid her in my pocket before we climbed back down

*ray a drop of golden sun*

When we finally left it was almost daylight and on Denman the last of the drag queens were settling their tabs trying to get home before the sun came up I left the poet at the restaurant where they sometimes let you sing for your supper picked up some cream from the 7-11 and wound my way to the pink house where I slept until the kitten started suckling my chin

*me a name I call myself*

The kitten sat in the palm of my hand not even big enough to drink from a bowl or even stand all dizzy she was so I called the vet and after he gave me a lecture on the selfishness of separating her from her mother too soon told me I needed an eye dropper and would have to feed the kitten on the hour

*far a long long way to run*

On the way to the store a man dragging a ten foot cross on his back was yelling about how he was Jesus and kept dying for our sins and how we were heathens in the west end homosexuals and perverts who would go to hell and I asked him if he was Jesus why did he have a wheel on the bottom of his cross

*sew a needle pulling thread*

I found a shoe box for the kitten who drank more than on the hour settled her in with an old T-shirt I couldn't think of a name so I called her Someone she had splotches of orange and brown with a pink nose I couldn't leave her at home seeing as how she had to be fed so often I decided to take her with on the way to work I ran into the poet who invited me to another party sure I said cool I could meet him at the 7-11 around midnight but he said I should meet him at the party then he took a poster out of his portfolio and wrote Jesus loves the burned out poets doe-eyed baby dykes and queers

*la a note that follows sew*

At work Moira said I could hide the kitten in her office so I go in and show her the eye drop and how to use it she says yeah yeah sure she'll take care of it just put it under her desk and I said she's not an it she's Someone and Moira says yeah yeah sure she knows and when I kneel down to slide the box under she wraps her legs around my head swivels so my face is in her crotch saying how delicious I am and she can't resist me and couldn't I just but then there's a knock on the door and I tell her if she does that again I'll bite her crotch which only makes her wiggle more her breasts almost leaping out of the tight spandex tube top and she says I'm even sexier when I threaten nasties

*tea a drink with jam and bread*

I drop the kitten off safely at home and promise her I'll be back for sunrise

The party is in an old brick warehouse you get in through a door in the back lane and I only find it because I see two women with blue and violet hair smoking cigarettes under a purple light inside it's like a mining shaft I go up then down along a corridor turn here and there the building vibrating from the music finally I can hear the buzz of voices smell of cigarettes and I am in a room of black on black on black where a band plays but it's too dark to see so I step right under the only light and the white of my dress shirt glows fluorescent everyone seems to stop dancing to look at me being the only one not dressed in black

*and that brings us back to doe*

The poet rescues me from the spotlight takes me to a room slips a black blazer over my shirt he tells me he'll take me shopping in the morning tells me to follow him he has some people I need to meet but as soon as we get back to the main room I lose him I hang around waiting for awhile but begin feeling dizzy so I go find a quiet spot and lie down a couple comes sinks in beside me necking then another couple and I'm starting to feel light-headed not sure whether they notice or if it matters when a woman leans over puts her hand on my chin pulls my head back and takes a good look she asks my name and I tell her then she sticks her tongue as far down my throat as she can her boyfriend says he is pleased to meet me

*doe doe doe doe*

In the morning I find Someone curled in a perfect ball on my sweater she blinks up at me stretches her paws I hold her to my neck so I can feel her purring hold her tightly until we both fall asleep

## Castle days

The poet dresses me in a pin-stripe suit and we go get ourselves cruised by the boys at *The Castle* he tells them I am his young catch from the country and aren't I darling he tells them feel free to buy me drinks even sit with us but don't touch it isn't clear whether they think I'm a boy or a girl the poet disappears into the washroom every twenty minutes and the table keeps filling up with beer

In the afternoon business men from the stock exchange and office towers fill the bar I'm afraid to go to the bathroom the poet tells me even straight guys like to have their dicks sucked in the dark and I laugh because I'm not sure what else to do but the thought of strange men sucking dicks makes me nauseous

The word dick makes me nauseous

At 2 the drag queens gather for a rendition of *I will survive* and it's the only time I truly long to be a fag standing up on the chairs hooting slopping beer on leather chaps shouting *sing it girl sing it* and I wish I could

## Afternoon stroll

The poet and I are walking down Robson arm in arm me in a neat grey suit my hair gelled back in the way I've become accustomed to wearing it the poet in black leather parading me the way he does rhyming caricatures of everyone we pass the pasty faced skin with his ear ringed nose hobbed women from *Raymond's* in their wool suits

*little Misses Muffet  
with their lingerie too tight  
look for baby lesbians  
to help them thru the night*

watching our feet in love with our feet the poet in his *Daytons* me with my new boots from *Fox* on Granville black and pointy but soft our feet pound the pavement echoing and then I feel a fist my neck snaps an angry mouth shouts fag fag fuckin' fag his black greasy hair the black boots kicking my shins his fists flailing and finally I grab his foot so that he topples over but he gets up even angrier lunges at me and we both fly over the bus bench into the street where I pull my knee up in his crotch as hard as I can a *Yellow Cab* skids to a stop in my face and finally the poet is there pulling him off pushing him away and I'm yelling at him that he's a cock sucker and a fuckin' maniac the poet shaking me shaking me finally slaps me and I let my shoulders fall

## **Star maker**

Johnny the bartender models on the side creates new drinks  
every week the Louella Parsons with a hint of schnapps the creamy  
Garbo a velvet hammer with double vodka because it's strong and shy  
and every time a hot young male sashays through the door he says oooh  
I want to lick from his head to his toes with a long pause  
in the middle

Johnny tells me I look like a silent film star I should cultivate mystery  
wear black and if I'm going to be a waiter always work at night  
in a hot place where you are sure to be a star

### **After hours**

Moira O Moira from Montreal keeps me snorting  
coke from her silver mirror never sleeps always  
looks as though she slipped off a magazine page  
she flirts with everyone keeps a string of pretty men  
but is more in love with beauty tells me she could dress  
me in drop dead ways why don't I just  
but I'm cultivating mystery the coke creates unreal  
confidence I tell her I wouldn't sleep with her if she was  
the last living hormone in the world



**I fall in love with leather**

black buckled hooked belted silver buttoned thick skinned ready-to-wear  
everything bounces off my leather knight in the saddle moving the air as I push  
through lets the anger boil keeps the blood hot lets me hide the bull's-eye of my heart

## **D - Day**

It's a slow Sunday afternoon when she comes in and sits in a corner booth with the two straight hairdressers who are bursting their jeans the way they do for the bobbed hair women who over-book hair appointments with them on account of boredom and the size of their crotch they order wine and are pressing into her from either side but I can feel her eyes on me as I turn away can feel them as I pull down the bottle of wine feel them as I take a sip of my juice feel them as I tuck the corkscrew in the side of my belt feel them as I head back to the table the hairdressers melting away her black eyes drawing me in until there is no noise but my heart beating and finally the pop of the cork

## **Day Two**

She comes again sits in the corner booth drinking the hairdresser's wine wears me down  
with her eyes until I am ready to follow her anywhere the moon the sea willing  
to take her home open my heart my hands willing to take off the shirt and tie

## **Day after day**

We sleep together in the pink house on more than one occasion but it isn't until her apartment on Barclay that things click and she moans in ways that make my fingers want to touch every out of the way place says today is the day peach lips kissing me holding my breath on the tip of her tongue

### **We go out walking**

Even though it is me in the suit and her in the skirt she lifts me in the air yanks at my tie loosens my belt puts her tongue behind my ear her hand fitting anywhere her hand fitting

We go out just to see each other in public share the same food same plate lift the fork to each others mouth want to put my finger on her lips there kiss her forehead the brow eyelids side of the nose ear always the lips

Even in the restaurant where you can sometimes sing for your supper we are causing quite a stir

## From the Bistro

Dear Anna

Happy to hear about the diving wish I could swim wish I could discover that world with you although I'm discovering my own working at a bistro learning how to say the names of French wines eating *vinaigrettes baked Camembert raspberry sauce Vichyssoise asparagus omelets* gaining so much weight I've outgrown my *Levis* the ones I swore I'd never throw out the ones with the patch you sewed still living in the pink house without windows don't miss the Skeena or my family or anyone but I daydream about you visiting imagine you exploring coral reefs long for you to meet Someone who hangs from the curtain as I write these lines also there is a certain Black-eyed woman who keeps me occupied in ways that make me feel I'm eight feet tall but she scares me the way she makes the ground slip from under pulls me around on the tip of her finger as if I was air

### **The foursome**

In the Poet's loft we share a bottle of tequila the Black-eyed woman nuzzling me the Poet rubbing his hand along his latest love telling him what a beautiful couple they would make the Poet's words the Painter's strokes but the Painter is distant wondering what colour the sky is and whether Don Juan really exists and how hard it would be to find him but it's raining and neither the Poet nor the Black-eyed woman have heard of Don Juan they don't believe in slipping through the fog into another world want to be here now want to fuck want to share this intimate act as an eternal bond between us and finally the Painter gets up pulls his leather jacket on slips out the door and without pausing to say good-bye I get up and follow

## **Painter Portraits**

The painter dips his brush in the can whips his canvas the wall  
a galaxy the way hope turns our gaze to possibilities  
to places where love is still and the paint lands exploding colour  
planets we will navigate our million spaceships lonely bumping into walls  
today he dances on cobblestones by the waterfront pony-tailed  
mad searching for colour walls begging to be painted

*red brick red brick  
must give this city a through-line*

when he speaks of light he is like an astronomer swimming  
through constellations one of those passionate scientists who  
understands not only the joy but the pain of discovery  
in the misty pastels of Vancouver mornings he navigates the pavement  
his body was created for painting not just his hands the whole  
length of him strokes the canvas



## **At The Montgomery Cafe**

The painter is hunched over a BLT telling me about his sister's  
fiance taking him to his first football game the *Lions vs Blue Bombers*  
how the fiance drank too much and the nine-year-old painter trying  
to be impressed with the game only feeling uneasy about the linebackers  
the way they slapped each other on the butt kept smiling eating his hot dog  
and how on the way home the fiance got all weepy pulled the car  
into the parking lot at Trout Lake crying and the painter put his hand on his shoulder  
while the fiance whimpered do you know how it hurts  
do you know  
how it hurts  
how the fiance unzipped his jeans pressed the painters young hands firmly  
over his prick saying just hold it just hold it till the pain goes

### **What I learn from the Black-eyed woman**

That the body is acrobatic it bends to the touch moves toward  
warmth cannot resist what it identifies as pleasurable  
that there are parts of me floating above the bed which  
cannot be touched and this is sad that her fingers are  
like anchors folding my body in the soft sheets and skin  
is a living organism lips electrical currents fingertips  
erase pain

## **Skin**

The Painter and I spend long nights lying next to each other he tells me we should marry just so we can lie like this not expecting anything not pushing each other or even wanting just safe in each other's presence he tells me he loves the Poet but cannot be touched he tells me he has no skin that if I tried to hold him I would cut right through that every year he is peeled away like an onion that there is no way to reverse this that soon he will not be able to hold it all together he will be blood and bone on the pavement and he hopes it will look beautiful for a moment before it fades

### **Skinny dipping**

We end up at Second Beach after the last party dies out and the Poet decides we should all go skinny dipping in the pool because the water is warm but we can still hear the waves and because it is summer the sky is tremendous but neither the Painter nor I can take our clothes off so we build a small fire with garbage and sticks from the playground and sit watching the Poet and the Black-eyed woman laughing and splashing wishing we could be that free could strip off the layers and dive into the cool I tell him how I love water have always longed to feel the cool against my skin and the Painter tells me he knows he will never be naked will never trust anyone except maybe me because I know how he feels and I tell him that I do tell him about my brother how my Mother taught me to wink and smile how it makes me feel like a deer trapped in headlights and how sometimes I think I'll never get through but that really I know I will and so will he I tell him about Mr. D and my journal about Anna tell him how we have bruises but the bruises create a map that show us the way out but the Painter tells me that isn't possible for him he tells me that underneath the pain there is only more pain and under that still more he tells me the only time he is happy is when he has a paintbrush in his hand but he can't always be painting can't always be running and sometimes he's just too tired to hold on

### **The six o'clock news**

The Poet and I are watching the news when we first hear about the plague as they called it which made me think I understood what it would have been like to hear your country was at war that your sons and brothers would be sent to the front lines that there would be casualties lives would be changed forever blood spilled except that in this war we would be the enemy but the poet says I'm being paranoid that this is a hoax a plot hatched by the fundamentalists who want us cured or killed and anyway even if it were true they would find a vaccination before it ever became a problem but it stays with me long after the tv is off fans the flames of all the fearful sermons I have heard over the years as if we had all just been condemned to death

### **Spit it out**

The Poet says we have two choices  
one you tell your story  
two you say nothing at all  
makes me think a whole lotta people have pricks  
stuck down their throats  
the great silencer  
the great revolver suck and suck and suck until  
it goes off  
most of us still choking  
a few biting down hard spitting the story  
out between gasps for air  
ocean of shame sucking us under

## **Blue knot**

They found the Painter hanging from a rope in his warehouse his brush dipped in blue on the floor beneath him the walls his jeans and T-shirt splashed in colour the Poet and I walked the streets for three days and three nights touching the brick where his brush stroked tracing each step as if we were in a video and could rewind the moments to the exact spot where he had knotted the rope overwhelmed by the real of it feeling the roughness of it on our skin replaying each scene in our mind and wondering when we could have spoken words which would have told him how good it was to be walking these streets with him touching these walls pressing ourselves against them as if we could hear the stories they held feeling only the hole he had created the blue of the sky a sad veil of all that was left unspoken

### **In the painter's absence**

In the painter's absence I spend long nights searching  
for his spirit in the brick long to touch him never did  
touch his skin only imagined it translucent smooth easily bruised  
and now what I am is lost in the night in the city in love with danger  
longing for my sad friend the one who swore he dreamed in colour  
that when his body left the bed at night it floated in a Van Gogh sky how  
he wished people could see the world as swirls of blue and yellow  
headlights in the night on the road in a bedroom the axis where  
our pain intersected the Painter the beautiful Painter who I loved  
more than anything yet never touched never held in my arms  
even when we were crying late at night crying in his bed side by  
side our bodies pure in each other's presence feeling safe  
because we hadn't touched feeling safe because we understood  
each other's pain



### **What I want to do**

What I want to do is blast off some balls forgiveness  
has no place in healing commands no respect  
not like blood on pavement the sound of bone  
on bone or a skull's crack some evidence  
to photograph the laws of possession why  
materiality is not about children's bodies

I don't want to argue the point only  
to tell you I've been here all along there is  
no rest everything reminds us  
of those black and musty moments

### **What I've seen**

baby pink underwear caught on a branch  
bruises on thighs the little one dragging  
her blanket into the closet to sleep crouched  
on the stairway afraid to go up  
or down  
where is the safe place

If they were strangers the plundering  
Viking the one-eyed pirate they'd be strung  
necks snapped the town would turn up for  
a picnic pass around the potato salad  
as we watched the feet kick  
but they are not strangers they are brothers  
fathers mothers friends we invite into  
our homes our hearts the ones we care  
for the ones we like to please

## **Disconnection**

Dear Anna

Don't want to say I'm afraid but I am feel out of control need to slow things down frame by frame see what makes me strong what makes me weak keep saying I don't have time to be a vegetarian right now to be healthy to take care which means I don't have time to think don't have time to question just keep tipping back the bottle eating out of boxes and cans can't get a sense of connection don't know where anything comes from am horrified at the thought of a dead cow but a burger doesn't bother me these days don't see the connection between cows and burgers trees and air potatoes and earth everything around me is like wedding cake so refined the essence isn't even an idea any more and now the Black-eyed woman wants to marry me says there are churches that do this sort of thing which charming but it isn't about me it's about possession man or woman this need to possess and I don't even know who I am I have a chance to live in the woods and I'm going Anna me and Someone alone for as long as it takes to put me back together again

September from the hollow

## Landmines

Dear Anna

I am here in the hollow listening to my body letting the strands come together diving down deep and surfacing which sounds so cliched I know but it's really how it feels last night I was in the bathtub and remembered the shifting mountains and I swear I was six years old and terrified that's the way it comes to me these days and it makes sense now that pain floats around like landmines exploding memories so vivid it's like you've walked back in time and are powerless at least my memories are like that always in the hands of someone I looked up to but they broke that trust Anna touching me here or there it's no wonder I felt so out of control had to hide away you never know what's going to trigger one of these memories like the way I used to think I was insane and how would I ever know even if you told me what difference would it make if I saw the world one way and you said it was another how could I know which one was real and remember how you told me I had a tragic air about me that was attractive I never could figure out why tragic was attractive but now I now it's because you can do what you want to tragic figures and feel beautiful in sorrow beautiful that you touched someone who was out of control and once you're tragic you attract all the craziness in the world you have a tenderness about you that lets people know they can hurt you and you won't think it's strange won't put up a fuss just lie back and cry and wonder how everyone knows you're crazy enough to let them use you that way

## **The way we die now**

It's only the idea of hands that takes  
your breath away now a familiar look  
that senses your experience with hollow  
and even though you can fight  
for your day-to-day that look is a hand  
and you know you're the puppet  
and you can hear the count down  
one one-thousand two as the world slips

### **Weekend before Labour Day**

This morning the Stellar Jays arrived weighing  
down the Sunflowers hanging on the edge pecking  
seeds until the head is a hollow disk  
pitted without colour without ruffle all summer long  
I have watched my Sunflowers burst into the air  
a foot a week climbing right out of my original design  
this is the cost of having another primary colour  
in my hollow another layer of bird song they are  
relentless will not leave until the last seed is eaten

## **Naked desire**

It rains and rains until my skin is steaming the forest closes in and even my dreams are of water and I want to break out of this hollow want to strip layers want to dive in feel free enough to swim naked fly to some southern destination and drink fatty concoctions of pineapple cream coconut and rum all kinds of rum thick syrupy demerera rum navy rum spiced amber or white rum to have my legs waxed and a neat bikini line along the thigh to have a manicure a pedicure paint my toe nails in a cherry burst so I can watch them bobbing as I float to flaunt the shape of my body be served refreshing things from wicker trays and baskets be coaxed by the sun or human touch into warm salty water be toweled down with care rolled onto a blanket have a good book read aloud with enthusiasm as I fight off the desire to nap I want to give the body what it needs to follow its lead when it turns toward the sun the soles of my feet tickling urging a natural migration south

## September from the hollow

Dear Anna

I walked through the forest today not on the trail but right through cutting my own path walking a tightrope of fallen trees under heavy fir boughs through waist high salal spotting fungus and cones of all sizes and unknown origins and mushrooms Anna mushrooms that made me dream of the sea it was a beautiful day such sweet west coast air that I imagine when you rip open this envelope it will make you dizzy with longing and I imagine you in your diving gear carving pumpkins on the ocean floor and I think I finally understand your love affair your desire to dive into a place barely touched with such colour and shapes and exotic names and all right there just a few steps to the left or right I came up for air laden with fungus and mushrooms which I long to taste imagining pine and almonds moss and apricots what a journey Anna to be alive in the peppery air the earth foam rubber underfoot



## **He walks again**

I am in the bath when it happens clean and pure as the holy water splashed on my forehead when as a child I was ill I am thinking of other baths how my mother wrapped me in clean flannel on cold nights fed me huge slices of lemon meringue when the soap found its way into my eyes I am smiling I can almost taste the lemon and then he is there and my breath is not I am in the bush behind the trailer park walking hand in hand he stops in a hollow sits on a stump pulls me onto his lap lifts my dress with one hand jams the other into my panties my clean panties I have just put on clean panties and I am under water again

**After I fly**

I wake in a sweat hands between my thighs a half moon curl  
in the bed the sound of leaves rustling the smell of undergrowth  
and my body convulses once as if landing in the soft folds  
it isn't enough that I am so many years from the hands  
in these moments all that anchors me is the still slow beating  
of my heart

### **On letting go**

I have to tell you of my pain how it wells up  
spills into morning tea at the pond how my  
tears could overflow the stones and right here  
in the hollow there would be an ocean my goldfish  
would be eaten by sharks and the surface  
break with killer whale fins there would be jellyfish  
seaweed and twice daily my pond would rise and wash  
over the rugged clearing

If I could just lean over and empty  
all this sorrow

## **The long road**

Dear Anna

Some days I don't believe I will ever love will ever touch skin  
one hand is like the other I can't see the difference  
want to believe in softness know that there are loving  
hands which hold and I dream of a lover who is  
neither breast nor genital a lover who is light lifts  
me in warm ways carries me from this pain but I know  
that this lover doesn't exist isn't outside of my  
body and I walk in the woods waiting to feel myself  
settle into this skin or lift into the air I'm not  
sure how it goes I walk away from myself  
toward myself and meanwhile there are tears

## **Inside Silence**

The Poet said that silence was a myth there wasn't a place on earth that didn't hum with life and I think about him rhyming his way across Europe meeting beautiful tongue-tied boys charming beer from the locals imagine him electric not like the Painter who understood stillness could be silent for hours stroking canvas I imagine him painting the firs which surround me imagine how he would capture the sounds close my eyes try to imagine him painting the sound of the woodpecker that knocks the perimeter of the hollow the sparrows and finches the Raven and goldfish the cat chasing one of the million fieldmice until I hear a distinct crunch which I cannot place open my eyes to see a spider eating a beetle in his web outside my window never thought I would hear the sound of a spider long to call the Poet and tell him he was right about silence long to call the Painter and invite him to the hollow let him spend his days painting let him empty his pain let the earth soak it up and deliver him whole

## **Floodgates**

You hold it back until it is no longer possible  
until you begin to see yourself diving off of cliffs  
begin to romanticize falling through space  
until you can almost see the colour of air  
but the smell of autumn cigars coffee hamburgers  
certain aftershaves you never know where the  
landmines are and you are so tired of steering clear  
want to lie your head down don't want to always  
be holding on

## After the flood

Dear Anna

We've had a storm this week so much rain I thought the cabin would float away coming in on a slant dripping on the dining room table buckets and pans everywhere water until it seemed like my body was steam and I could slip through a crack and the firs would inhale me and I've been so sad I wanted to become something green and shiny forever but then I remembered listening to the lilies that day by the Skeena and how everything seemed possible and I put on my raincoat and ran out into the hollow and down the path and kept running and running the water finding its way down my neck leaping up into my boots I ran until my sides hurt and was breathless laughing and I kept yelling *I made it I made it* and I knew I could stop running finally could sit on a stump and wait for the deer to come graze could walk back to the cabin and make tea could pick up a pen and write you these words could gather these fragments together and begin

**Out of the fog a whisper**

It's always the same  
you kill off the one who  
loves to kill the one  
who hurts  
and I whisper  
look at the hands

beyond the clouds  
beyond the hands  
there is light

and you speak of anger's  
freeing power  
but clouds are clouds  
and no matter how loudly  
you yell  
look there are clouds  
give us no more clouds  
they will not fade  
only know that they  
are only clouds  
and beyond them blue